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ABSTRACT

This study analyzed the beliefs of student teachers in two Hong Kong teacher training programs: the Post-Graduate Diploma of Education (PGDE) and the Teachers' Certificate (TC) programs. It examined student teachers' beliefs when they first entered the program and noted characteristics of the beliefs. Ten student teachers from a 1-year PGDE (secondary) course and 10 student teachers from a 2-year TC program participated. Data were collected via semi-structured interviews regarding: important aspects of education, the teacher's role, the learner's role, learning difficulties of learners, how subject matter should be taught in schools, and important factors for successful teaching and learning. Student teachers have developed their beliefs in teaching and learning before entering their initial teacher training program. The content of their beliefs was closely related to their past experiences. The content formed a network of belief systems of teaching and learning in different dimensions. Student teachers' beliefs seemed deeply rooted in their environment and culture. Their beliefs reflected two distinctive types of views on teaching and learning: ideal and reality. The two groups of student teachers differed in their beliefs about teaching and learning. TC students were not as confident as PGDE student teachers in subject matter knowledge. They were also younger and less experienced. (Contains 10 references.) (SM)

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Student Teachers' Beliefs – What Have They Brought To The Initial Teacher Training

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Jacqueline K.S. Chan

Introduction

What makes a good teaching? What should the student teachers acquire in the initial teacher's training program? What are the factors affecting the learning to teach process? Is there anything being neglected in the process of teacher training? How should the initial teacher training be improved? Such questions always come to our minds in searching for the improvement of our teacher education.

Since student teachers brought with their own prior experiences, thoughts and values, it is therefore of interest to investigate if these experiences, thoughts and values have the impact on their professional development.

In the past twenty years, research in teacher's thought processes and beliefs have developed fairly well in the west. However, similar studies in Hong Kong are few. In light of the coming expansion of teacher education programs in Hong Kong, knowing what and how student teachers develop their thoughts and beliefs are important in the improvement of the teacher education program.

Aims of the study

This study aims to describe and analyze the beliefs of the student teachers in two different teacher training programs, i.e. The Post-graduate Diploma of Education (PGDE) and the Teachers' Certificate (TC) programs. In particular, the study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the beliefs held by the student teachers' when they first enter into the Initial Teacher Training Program?
2. What are the characteristics of the beliefs of the student teachers?

In addition, this was the first stage of the longitudinal research project involving stages of student teachers' development in their initial teacher training program. In this preliminary stage, the research focused on the initial beliefs held by the student teachers at their first entrance of the programs. Subsequent stages focused on the further development of the student teachers' beliefs during their studies in the teacher training programs.

Literature Review

In the literature of teacher education, teachers' thoughts, judgments,

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decisions and behaviors are interesting and significant areas of study, e.g. Shavelson & Stern (1981). According to Clark and Peterson's (1986) major categories of teachers' thought processes, three main categories were identified, namely (1) teacher planning (preactive and postactive thoughts); (2) teachers' interactive thoughts and decisions; and (3) teachers' theories and beliefs. Although the first two categories relate to teacher's pedagogical planning and decisions on instructions, the third emerges as a distinct field.

The term 'belief' generally refers to suppositions, commitments and ideologies which can be interchangeable with terms such as 'attitudes', 'judgments', 'opinions', 'ideologies'. 'perceptions', 'conceptions', 'conceptual system', 'preconceptions', 'dispositions', 'implicit theories', 'personal theories' and 'perspectives' (Calderhead, 1996). Teacher beliefs have vital impact on teachers' decisions made in planning the lessons, giving instructions and interacting with children, knowing and expecting children's growth. Moreover, the beliefs help teacher colleagues to recognize the compatibility in the working context and form mutually supportive social groups.

Before "teachers' beliefs" has become an important research issue in the field of education, the term "belief" has been explored extensively in other fields such as psychology, sociology, etc. Extending these lines of research, "beliefs" in the field of education includes the focus of attitudes and values, self-efficacy, self concept and self-esteem, attribution beliefs and locus of control, subject specific beliefs such as beliefs about reading, mathematics, or the nature of science, beliefs about the nature of intelligence, of knowledge and of motivation (Pajares, 1992).

With a close connection with teaching and learning, Calderhead (1996) summarizes five main areas in which teachers have been found to hold significant beliefs. The five areas are: beliefs about learners and learning, beliefs about teaching, beliefs about subject, beliefs about learning to teach, and beliefs about self and the teaching role. Such areas, he argues are by no means separated but rather interrelated with each other, for instance, teaching beliefs about teaching may closely relate to beliefs about subject.

Although the research on teacher beliefs is substantively developed in the West, there is only a few in the local context of Hong Kong. There are studies on the needs of beginning teachers in Hong Kong highlighting the concerns of the beginning teachers in various dimensions. It was found that the major problems perceived by the different groups of beginning teachers fell within the same three categories, namely teaching in classroom/laboratory, management and control, and lesson preparation

(Cooke, & Pang, 1987). Related studies on beginning teachers also highlighted the instructional problems of the beginning teachers (e.g. Cooke & Pang, 1990). There were studies emphasizing reflections in teacher education (e.g. Pang, 1991). However, research in student teachers' beliefs at their initial teacher training stage has not been well developed in Hong Kong.

Unlike the development of Western societies, in terms of political, economic, social and cultural aspects, do the preservice teachers in Hong Kong differ in their beliefs as in the West? How do these beliefs of preservice teachers develop? This paper tries to find out the answers correspondingly.

Methodology

Sample: Ten student teachers from the one-year full-time PDGE (Secondary) Course of The Chinese University of Hong Kong and ten student teachers from the two-year full-time Certificate Course (Secondary) of The Hong Kong Institute of Education were invited based on their willingness to participate in the study. In addition, it was encouraged that fresh graduates with no prior teaching experiences to join the project and to ensure that their elective subjects cover a wide range of academic subjects even though it was not a representative sample.

Of the twenty student teachers, four of them were male and sixteen are females. All the PGDE student teachers had completed their undergraduate studies in the University and five of them had gained two years full time working experience in other fields such as banking, industry, trading, private school tutor, etc. The other five of the PGDE student teachers were fresh graduates. Of the ten student teachers attending the TC, only two had gained full time working experience after their graduation in the secondary schools in non-educational fields, two student teachers were unknown for their prior working experience, the other six student teachers were fresh graduates with the completion of the matriculation course. The PGDE student teachers' majors varied, from the liberal arts, pure science to social science. Similarly, the student teachers in the TC course in the secondary division (to be prepared for secondary school teachers) varied in their majors and minors such as languages (English, Chinese and Puotunghua), fine arts, civic education, mathematics and physical education.

Method: The present study was a natural exploration of the beliefs of student teachers at their first entrance of their respective teacher training program. The data were collected qualitatively by in-depth interviews. Justifications for apply the naturalistic model to the present study are due to the following reasons:

1. Belief is one of the most complexities of human minds that cannot

be measured easily by scientific inquiry. Furthermore, there can hardly be any events to be expected and then to be recorded by types or by frequencies as it does in the scientific way.

2. The qualitative method of obtaining data from the informants would treasure every participants' words, stories, thinking and beliefs that would fill the gap of conventional approaches to evaluation which, as commented by Robert Stake that "they were not sufficiently attentive to the concerns of the individuals for whom the evaluation was being conducted" (Popham, 1993).

3. Observation method is not used in this study since it is not cost effective as compared to the in-depths interviews in the involvement of much more manpower as well as the training and monitoring of observers.

4. Through in-depth interviews, the lines of thoughts of the student teachers can be traced and revealed. Hence, it is more effective in gathering the real data of the informants in this way.

In this study, the student teachers were interviewed at the beginning of the first semester when they commenced the initial teacher training program.

The interview

The interviews were semi-structured and the interview guides were developed from the literature of teacher education (e.g. Elbaz, 1991; Nespor, 1985). The questions included in the interviews (for all stages) were as follows:

1. What is considered as important in the education of our schools?
2. What is the role of a teacher?
3. What is the role of a learner?
4. What are the learning difficulties of the learners?
5. How should the subject matter (the major and minor subjects of the student teacher) be taught in the school? How should learning instructions to be carried out?
6. What are the important factors for successful teaching and learning?

In addition, the informants were asked to tell anything about their views on education other than the above questions to supplement any information being neglected in the interviews.

The interview guide was appropriate for it addressed the major concerns of a teacher's beliefs in the professional development during the teacher training.

Finally, the success of the study depends very much on the research tool- the investigator(s). As the gathering scheme was human instruments, there were times when the human instruments got tired of the job, became fatigue, wore special

lens to view the informants, possessed bias on the educational issues or anything related to the study and communicated this bias to the informants unconsciously, or were unaware of the messages conveyed by all means of the environment as well as the informants. Therefore, it was the other side of the coin when qualitative kind of study was considered as informal, flexible, subjective, and based on evolving audience concerns (Popham, 1993). In order to avoid the hierarchical relationship of the interviewer and the informants, i.e. the lecturer and student relationship, the student teachers from The Hong Kong Institute of Education were to be interviewed by the researcher from The Chinese University of Hong Kong and the student teachers were to be interviewed by the researcher from The Hong Kong Institute of Education.

Results

Since the interviews were conducted in Cantonese, a Chinese dialect, the transcriptions presented here were translated as much as possible according to the main ideas, content as well as the tone presented by the informants. However, there might be some differences in the expressions of another language and the accuracy of the scripts should not expected to be 100% correct although accuracy has attended to (1) the exact content; and (2) the words; and (3) the intonation.

The themes emerging from the transcribed scripts clusters around three main categories: (I) reasons for taking in the full time initial teacher training program; (II) general beliefs in education; (III) beliefs relate to major / minor subjects

I. Reasons in becoming a teacher by taking the teacher training courses

1. Personal factors

Personality and perceived strengths in teaching

Student teachers believed that they were being caring and loving, enthusiastic to get along with people would match very well with a teacher's job. To them, these personalities seemed to be inborn and they self-asserted their own suitability for a teacher's job requirement in respect of personality.

Although my major is science related, I don't like staying in the laboratory for my career. I like to get along with people..... I want to become a teacher. (PGDE student)

I believe that I shall be a good teacher because my caring and loving personality. This is an important factor for becoming a good teacher. (TC student)

2. Previous experiences

a. Influence from their own learning experiences

Student teachers were influenced by their own learning experiences during their growth as a student. Some were proud of their successful learning experiences, their interest being established within a subject or the confidence built up during the learning process.

> *I love math and Economics in my secondary days. ... ... Math (provides me the chances) for problem solving. I've got much satisfaction through problem solving ... ... For Economics, I started (to read the book) with less content (words) but more pictures. As I read through the book, I've developed interest in it. It (Economics) got the reasons and the reasons to explain things... ... It's easy for me to learn Economics. (PDGE students)*

Teachers also appeared to be impressive figures in the student teachers' memories. These teachers were portrayed as either positive figures who served as a role model in teaching, or as negative figures who demonstrated bad examples in the classroom teaching.

> *I remembered a very nice teacher when I was young. She was a math teacher. She taught very well and concerned about her students as well. She was very encouraging and aroused my interest in math. She was my role model and I would like to be that teacher when I grew up.*
>
> *(PGDE student)*
>
> *That's my experience. I remembered my teachers just held their textbooks in front of them and continued their talks. (TC student)*

b. Previous working experience

While the student teachers have got some working experiences, such experiences do have impacts on their thoughts about interpersonal relationships, at work or to certain extent in teaching. Their working experiences ranged from full time to part time, from teaching to non-teaching or from paid to voluntary in nature. Most of these experiences were positive to them in relation to the job of teaching.

- Teaching: informal and formal experiences

Most of the student teachers have been working as part-time private tutors or on a voluntary basis in youth centers. Two of the student teachers had been full-time teachers before, one being the teacher of a private informal education institution for one year and one being a supply teacher in a formal secondary school for five days. Most of them gained positive experiences.

I've met a boy with low motivation in class. I remembered that I talked to him seriously. After that I adopted a new approach - praised him whenever he made improvement. Two weeks later his mother told me that he had great improvement in his work, and he improved in other areas too..... ....I got much satisfaction with this. (PDGE student)

- Non-teaching: informal and formal experiences

Some of the student teachers have been working for other full-time or part-time jobs in either private or public funded organizations unrelated to education. The working experiences seemed to provide them more positive and dynamic ways of looking at interpersonal relationships and at work.

My previous job in the industry emphasizes brainstorming, that means the idea comes out from four or five is far better than comes out from one. I feel this is true.... When I apply this method in the group project, they (the ideas) can be more. (PGDE student)

3. Backgrounds

a. Family

The influence from family mostly came from parental expectations and role models. This was always the case of student teacher attending the Teachers' Certificate Course.

I haven't thought of becoming a teacher before but then my mother said teaching suited me best. (TC student)

b. Religious

One student teacher claimed that he had become interested in getting along with young people since he has worked as a leader of a youth group in his church. This might also the reason that he attended the teacher training program since he was not sure how to tackle with

the value conflicts of the youths. There might be more than one student teacher got religious background but the other student teachers did not mention about religion in the conversations. Therefore it was assumed at least one of them got the influence from religion.

Although I am not teacher, I have frequent contacts with the secondary school students because I am a Christian and am serving my church for the pastoral care of young people. (PGDE student)

4. Social factors

a. Influence from peers

Some student teachers got their influence from their peers who had become teachers or had finished the teacher training course and then recommended the course to them or simply by conversations in familiarizing the student teachers in teaching.

When I was just wondering whether I'd be suitable for a teacher or not, then I met my classmate who had taken the Dip Ed. and he recommended the course to me. (PDGE students)

5. Career prospects

a. The nature of the career as a teacher

In terms of salary and stability, teaching is considered to be a high entrance salary and stable job that somehow people would make it as equivalent to a civil servant. The job as teacher was especially treasured by the graduates when the society was experiencing economic recession.

Honestly speaking, some of the factors that I was attracted by the career (teaching) are the salary and the holidays entitled. (PGDE student)

b. Comparisons with other careers:

Some student teachers having prior working experiences in other fields would compare their previous job with that of a teacher in terms of job nature, job satisfaction and career prospects.

I was once working in the branch office of a bank which I

found was not suitable to me..... The reason that I like teaching is because I was influenced by my teachers (in secondary school). I wanted to be my teacher once a day.

(PGDE student)

c. Lack of other choices in tertiary education

Some student teachers would choose teacher training as they further studies in higher education institute rather than nowhere to go and then enter the job market without any skills or knowledge for a particular career. These student teachers usually did not have a thorough understanding of teaching and learning but simply because they had no other choices. This phenomenon normally happened in the cases of the TC student teachers.

Honestly speaking, students here have nowhere to go except here in the Institute.....They do not qualify to enter the university and just come and stay here for a full-time study. (TC student)

6. Major subject matter

The major subjects of the student teachers seemed to be a decisive factor for the university students graduates to determine their careers, such as the business majors would like to seek a job in the business world while those who took liberal arts or pure science would probably to prepare to be a teacher as their major subjects matched with the subject matter in the secondary curriculum. However, it was the other way round in the cases of TC student teachers when they made the choice of a career and their major subject matter simultaneously when they entered the teacher training program.

My major is Chinese Language and Literature. I think I have to go into the jobs relating to this.....then I choose teachig. (TC student)

II. General beliefs on education

1. Educational aims (ideal Vs reality)

There are two different orientations towards the educational aims of the secondary education in Hong Kong according the student teachers. However, the two orientations are not necessarily separated independently from each other. Sometimes, the student teacher would see the

complementary function of the two.

a. Personal growth

There was an emphasis of the student teachers on the acquisition of thinking skills of the pupils. Such skills, seemed to be kinds of higher order ability and were significant in ways for enhancing life skills. Through the thinking skills acquisition, the student teachers expected this was the right path to lead their students to develop a lens to distinguish rights and wrongs in developing the orientations or values of life. It was therefore a sense of moral development of the pupils that was stressed by the student teachers as important in the secondary school education which would be further elaborated in the following moral aspects. The student teachers elaborated the thinking skills needed to be mastered as:

> *I think the most important thing to be learned by the pupils is the ability to analyse things around. That's the ultimate goal of school education. (PGDE student)*

b. Societal needs

The student teachers considered education should be closely related to the needs of the society. In matching the societal needs, the student teachers believed that knowledge to be acquired should be practical. Fundamental subjects such as language learning (English, Chinese and Mandarin) and mathematics are important in enhancing individual's life skills in meeting the society's needs. Moreover, training in higher order thinking are necessary according to the needs of the society.

> *The school should let the pupils learn to be a suitable member of the society, to be accepted by the society and in ways to contribute to the society. I feel these are fundamental in the school education ..... It's not how much can a student quote the information of History, these are not important, The most important thing is to train them (the pupils) to have the thinking skills so that they can be adapted to the society in the future. (PGDE Student)*

> *I think it is fundamental to help them (the pupils) to acquire the skills to be independent, or the practical life skills. These skills facilitate them to work or communicate with others..... The examples of the skills include the language learning and the mastery of numbers, i.e. English., Chinese and mathematics. The mastery of these skills help them to communicate*

either in writing or in verbal expressions. (PGDE student)

In the secondary school curriculum, I think time should be allocated to the acquisition of life skills, the communications skills with others, and sex education. I think these should have a place in the curriculum. (TC student)

2. Moral aspects

There are two dimensions of the student teachers in their moral expectations: of the pupils and of the teachers. Although these two dimensions are fundamentally separated, the two dimensions do intersect at the point when the teacher was considered as a role model in guiding the pupils to the right path.

a. Expectations of pupils

- Personal conduct

The personal conduct of the pupils are expected to be at two levels: first the explicit behaviors to be morally enacted and the second level of the development of moral reasoning in determining the rights or the wrongs.

For one instance when my student spoke with foul language, I stopped them immediately. I know this kind of expression is popular but I myself should be disciplined not to say these languages. (PGDE student)

Nowadays students got problems in their attitudes, e.g. not motivated in class. I think the basic attitudes of the students should be dealt with before anything could be taught. (TC student)

I think I can help them (the pupils) to develop their values, ethics, or something to be determined as rights or wrong.....In fact, the rights and wrongs have become ambiguous in the minds of secondary young people. (PGDE student)

- Value judgment

Pupils were expected to develop value judgments to guide the right ways in their daily life apart from knowledge acquisition.

Students do not learn adequately in the schools. What I mean is, putting aside the subjects, the students may not know the right way of the value judgments as far as they are educated. May be

there is no more time to teach these things. The students may not know the right and wrongs, how to make decisions to be considerate..... (PGDE student)

- Critical thinking

The student teachers stressed that kind of thinking skill can be reached through examples of the subject matter knowledge.

I think teaching content could be reduced to allocate more time to deal with the training in thinking skills. Actually it is more meaningful if the teaching content can be related to live examples. (PGDE student)

- Social norms

Pupils were expected to conform to the social norms such as politeness, consideration of others' needs, or be an independent individual instead of being a burden of the society.

I think moral is important. What the students learned are actually helping them to be adaptive to the society. If pupils lack fundamental moral value judgments, he or she may misuse the knowledge and that would influence the society. Education is to educate the young to be contributive but not destructive to the society. (PGDE student)

b. Expectations of teachers

- Teacher as a model

Teachers were expected as pupils' models and should be alert on own behaviors in class or even outside the classroom.

Pupils will follow the ways that the teachers do. That's why I don't like some teachers demonstrating inappropriate behaviors to their pupils..... I think teacher as a role model is more important than merely preaching the pupils. It's a paradox when the teacher tells the students don't do that and that but on the other hand the teacher do that thing.

(PGDE student)

- Attitudes in class

The teachers should be warm, enthusiastic and helpful to perform good and relevant attitudes in class.

The teacher should be enthusiastic and warm to his/her pupils, or else the delivery is only limited to transmission of knowledge. (PGDE student)

- Responsibility

  The teacher should be responsible in teaching in ways of good preparation of lessons, understand and responsive to students' learning needs.

  I don't accept a teacher keeps scolding the pupil(s) throughout the lesson. That's of no use to the pupil(s) except hurting him/her/them. ..... It wastes other pupils' time (in learning) too. (PGDE student)

- Caring and concerns for students

  The teachers had to be patient with his/her pupils, in particular, to be a caring and loving person who always concerned the pupils' needs.

  Teacher should be patient and know his/her pupils' needs - his/her psychological or family backgrounds. Because a lot of things related to his /her backgrounds, so a teacher should know the reason behind the pupils' behaviors instead of scolding him all the times.

  (TC student)

- Subject matter knowledge

  The teacher had to be an expertise in his/her subject matter. He/she should know the content well and to know other areas of knowledge as desirable.

  Teacher resembles a multi-purpose tool box in knowing whatever topic areas in communicating with the pupils. Apart from an academic expertise, he or she should has a good mastery in students' psychology as well. (TC student)

3 Classroom management

The student teachers prioritized classroom discipline control on the top of other matters, or else classroom teaching could never be carry out.

a. Discipline ranks first

Discipline was the major problem to be resolved as considered by the student teachers. Without discipline, teaching could not be carried out.

Much of the time in teaching is spent in classroom discipline, I think that reflects my future teaching – will spend most of the time to management the class discipline before I can think of any ways to teach them well. (PGDE student)

b. Relationship between teacher and students

Although some student teachers believed that friendship should be built between teacher and pupils, some could not believe this would really happen with the existence of the hierarchical relationship of the two parties.

Generally speaking, I think he or she (the teacher) should know the needs of students.....to get along with pupils very well but with some dignity of the teacher, to help to students to face their problems during their growth.... (TC student)

But the relationship (between teacher and pupil) is not the same as good friends because of the hierarchical relationship, I'd rather play the custodial role with effective communicative with the pupils. (TC student)

4. Teacher's role (factors contribute to successful teaching)

Some student teachers expected the role of a facilitator, a counselor, or an intellectual of subject matter as a teacher. Unanimously, the student teachers all saw the important function of a teacher in helping pupils to get through the learning difficulties.

Ideally, I think of the role of a facilitator but with leader's role as well. The transmission role in the content delivery is reduced..... (PGDE student)

I think the teacher' role should be a helping person, a facilitator. (PGDE student)

5. Learner's role, factors attributing to learners' failures, inborn or environmental factors affecting learners' learning

Learners were seen as having influence from their environment

such as the family, their peers and the macro worlds. Factors affecting learners' failures related to the external environmental factors as well as internal control such as the effort. The student teachers unanimously agreed that the learning problems of the learners can be remedied through effort.

I think children do not differ much in their intelligence. Only limited numbers of people outperform others, normally as a result of own effort. (TC student).

6. Pedagogy

There are two distinguished types, one being the "ideal" and the other being the "as-is mode". The "ideal model" involved the pupil-centered practices and the "as-is model" did mean the normal practices, always traditional approach.

The school should adopt multiple teaching and learning strategies without limited to the textbook information, e.g. out-door activities, visits, etc.....This will provide real life experiences to them (the pupils). (PGDE student)

Flexible means more participation of pupils instead of talks and talks in one way (communication) which is not good. (TC student).

(III) Beliefs of major / minor subject matter

a. Subject identity

Student teachers ranked their own subject matter first, or in close relationship with other significant subjects such as Mandarin and Chinese languages.

In reality, it's the schools which do not consider geography important. The lack of choice of the students in the arts stream choose geography reluctantly. For me, I personally consider geography important. (PGDE student)

b. Significance of subject matter in school curriculum

Student teachers felt the subjects they were going to teach in the secondary school were significant.

Economics is a very good subject. It helps to train the pupils to think logically. (PGDE student).

PE is important in the school since all round development of pupils is needed. Without a good health, nothing is important. (TC student)

c. Subject matter knowledge

The PDGE student teachers were confident that they could teach at the

secondary school levels though with some worries in the delivery of content where those from the Certificate Course expressed their worries in teaching about their mastery of subject matter knowledge.

> I have confidence in teaching (my own subject). But the difficulties lie in how can I explain the points clearly to the students. (PGDE student)

> To teach lower secondary level – (to me) is inadequate. It's because two-years' training (in teacher education) is rather short. I ought to have further study. (TC student).

c. Pedagogy of subject matter

There were some difference in views of the pedagogy in the student teachers' own subject matters, e.g. the Chinese language teachers would prefer traditional methods while that of the science teacher would prefer inquiry methods. In general, the student teachers thought that the lessons should be delivered in a lively style and embedded in daily life practices. The instructional method should be interesting, interactive as well as attractive. However, these kinds of instructions had their restrictions because of the reality – the pressure from the teaching schedule and the public examination.

> I think I should give them (the pupils)more time to develop their thinking skills in order to learn better. Group discussion is the way to achieve that in the classroom teaching, just like my science teacher did in the secondary school. I feel this is really good……. But the secondary school curriculum is too tight to allow the use of this method…..(PGDE student)

d. Examination factors

Some PDGE student teachers thought their being good at the taking the examinations when they were pupils could share this skills with the pupils in enhancing the teaching of that particular subject but the TC students did not mentioned these kinds of experiences.

> My confidence (of teaching the higher forms) comes from my instructional methods and my (successful) experiences from the public examinations. (PGDE student)

Analysis

The results of the study supported the findings in previous studies on student

teachers' entry characteristics that the student teachers had developed their beliefs in teaching and learning before they entered their initial teacher training program , e.g.. Kagan, 1992; Brookhart and Freeman, 1992. As found in previous literature, the beliefs of student teachers in this study were developed from their learning or working experiences through their different stages of life development. The content of the student teachers' beliefs were closely related to their backgrounds of experiences such as their learning and working experiences, their school teachers, the mode of instructions they had received, their subject matters, their peers, their parents, their family backgrounds, their experiences of examinations, their own personalities and career aspirations. These contents of beliefs formed a network of the beliefs system of the student teachers in teaching and learning in different dimensions. The network of the student teachers' beliefs had formed their frames of reference through which they formulated their own views on education and schooling in general, teacher' roles and learner's roles, the pedagogy adopted, classroom management, teacher-pupil relationship and their expectations of the career of teaching.

Based on the long-term development of the teachers' beliefs from their early experiences, the student teachers' beliefs seemed to be deep rooted in their growing environment and culture, such as the Chinese language teachers' beliefs in the of traditional instructions of reading and writing and other expected that the examination influence on teaching and learning, etc. Such deep rooted beliefs, will be difficult to change given that the legacies of the past successfully linked to the present environments.

The beliefs of the student teachers also reflected two distinctive types of views on teaching and learning: the "ideal" type and the "reality" type. The "ideal" type reflected the progressive views on education in general where teachers acts as facilitators to help learners to construct their own learning in an ideal and supportive environment. Learners' needs in the particular environment are closely attended to and their potentials are given chances to develop. On the other hand, the "reality" type reflected the reality of the present learning environment: the cramming of the teaching schedule, the examination driven syllabus, the numbers of students in a class that make individual differences difficult to be attended to, the drilling exercises mandated by the school evaluation systems, etc. Both types of views coexist in the student teachers' belief system despite of their conflicting natures. The reasons account for the coexistence of the conflicting models in the belief system of the student teachers may be the influence of the coursework of the teacher education program. This is due to the fact that the interviews were conducted three or four weeks after the

student teachers had started their course work but before their teaching practice. The ideal view will come from the effect of the learning from the course work. However, the prior experiences of the student teachers constitute another system of beliefs which are in conflict with the ideal view. In this way, the "ideal" type acts as a stimuli in the student teachers in learning to learn, but also as a confrontation with the "reality".

Finally, the two groups of student teachers differed in their beliefs in teaching and learning. First, the TC student teachers were not as confident as the PGDE student teaches in their subject matter knowledge. This may due to the fact that the two groups of students had different entries of knowledge base in their subject matters, with the PGDE student teachers successfully completed their undergraduate work in their majors while the TC students only completed their A-level examinations. Second, the ages of the two groups of teachers also differed giving rise to the relatively inexperienced TC student teachers. The decisions of the TC student teacher in their careers were naïve and usually under the influence of their significant others while the PGDE student teachers were firm in their decisions made on their own.

On the whole, the results of the study echoed the findings on the "learning to learn" literature. However, the study also reflected some of the distinctive features of the student teaches' beliefs in Hong Kong context and the group differences between the two types of programs of student teachers.

Conclusion

The study of student teacher's belief has its implications to the teacher educators and the teacher education institution as a whole. The student teachers' beliefs have always been neglected in the process of the initial teacher education. Teacher educators are always unaware of the student teachers' beliefs and may deliver inappropriate knowledge throughout the courses of the initial teacher training programs resulting in the student teachers reconfirming their own judgments and beliefs in the teaching practice. In moving towards the professionalisation of teachers, the teacher educators, the teacher education institutions and the schools should work together in taking care of the student teachers' beliefs and help them to develop their professionalism.

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